SATIRE 1

Why Write Satire?

Must I be always a listener only, never hit back,
although so often assailed by the hoarse *Theséid* of Cordus?
Never obtain revenge when X has read me his comedies,
Y his elegies? No revenge when my day has been wasted
by mighty Telephus or by Orestes who, having covered
the final margin, extends to the back, and still isn't finished?
No citizen's private house is more familiar to *him*
than the grove of Mars and Vulcan's cave near Aeolus' rocks
are to *me*; what the winds are up to, what ghosts are being
tormented
on Aeacus' rack, from what far land another has stolen 10
a bit of gold pelt, how huge are the ash-trunks Monychus
hurls—
the unending cry goes up from Fronto's plane-trees, his marble
statues and columns, shaken and shattered by non-stop
readings.
One gets the same from every poet, great and small.
I too have snatched my hand from under the cane; I too
have tendered advice to Sulla to retire from public life
and sleep the sleep of the just. No point, when you meet so many
bards, in sparing paper (it's already doomed to destruction).
But why, you may ask, should I decide to cover the ground
o'er which the mighty son of Aurunca drove his team? 20
If you have time and are feeling receptive, here's my answer.

When a soft eunuch marries, and Mevia takes to sticking
a Tuscan boar, with a spear beside her naked breast,
when a fellow who made my stiff young beard crunch with his
clippers

can challenge the whole upper class with his millions, single-
handed;
when Crispinus, a blob of Nilotic scum, bred in Canópus,
hitches a cloak of Tyrian purple onto his shoulder
and flutters a simple ring of gold on his sweaty finger
(in summer he cannot bear the weight of a heavy stone),
it's hard *not* to write satire. For who could be so inured 30
to the wicked city, so dead to feeling, as to keep his temper
when the brand-new litter of Matho the lawyer heaves in sight,
filled with himself; then one who informed on a powerful friend
and will soon be tearing what's left of the carcase of Rome's
aristocracy,
one who makes even Massa shiver, whom Carus caresses
with bribes, and Thymele too, sent by the frightened Latinus;
when you're shouldered aside by people who earn bequests at
night,
people who reach the top by a form of social climbing
that now ensures success—through a rich old female's funnel?
Proculéius obtains a single twelfth, but Gillo eleven: 40
each heir's reward is assessed by the size of his organ.
Very well. Let each receive the price of his life-blood, becoming
as pale as a man who has stepped on a snake in his bare feet,
or is waiting to speak in the contest at the grim altar of Lyons.
Why need I tell how my heart shrivels in the heat of its anger,
when townsfolk are jostled by the flocks attending on one who
has cheated
his ward and left him to prostitution, or on someone condemned
by a futile verdict? For what is disgrace if he keeps the money?
The exiled Marius drinks from two, happily braving
the wrath of heaven; the province which won is awarded—
tears. 50
Am I not right to think this calls for Venusia's lamp?
Am I not right to attack it? Would you rather I reeled off epics—
of Heracles or Diomédes or the labyrinth's frantic bellows,
the splash of the youngster hitting the sea, and the flying joiner,
when a pimp, if his wife is barred from benefit, coolly pockets
the gifts brought by her lover, trained to stare at the ceiling,
trained to snore in his cups through a nose that's wide awake;
when this man feels entitled to covet command of a cohort,

no longer possessing a family fortune, having presented
every cent to the stables—look at Autómedon junior 60
as he flies along the Flaminia, whipping the horses and holding
the reins himself, swanking in front of his girl in her greatcoat.
There, at the intersection, wouldn't you like to fill
a large-size notebook when a figure comes by on six pairs of shoulders
in a litter exposed on this side and that and almost indecent,
recalling in many ways the limp and sprawling Maecenas,
a forger of wills who has turned himself into a wealthy gentleman
with the simple aid of a sheet of paper and a moistened signet?
Here is a high-born lady, who just before handing her husband
some mellow Calenian adds a dash of shrivelling toad. 70
Surpassing Lucusta herself, she trains untutored neighbours
to brave the scandal and walk behind their blackened lords.
If you want to be anything, dare some deed that merits confinement
on Gýara's narrow shore; honesty is praised, and shivers.
Crime pays—look at those grounds and mansions and tables,
the antique silver, and the goat perched on the rim of the cup.
Who can sleep when a daughter-in-law is seduced for money,
when brides-to-be are corrupt, and schoolboys practise adultery?
If nature fails, then indignation generates verse,
doing the best it can, like mine or like Cluvienus'. 80

Once, when torrents of rain were raising the ocean's level,
Deucalion sailed to the top of a hill and sought for guidance.
Little by little the stones grew warm and soft with life,
and Pyrrha displayed her naked girls to the gaze of men.
What folks have done ever since—their hopes and fears and anger,
their pleasures, joys, and toing and froing—is my volume's hotch-potch.
Was there, at any time, a richer harvest of evil?
When did the pocket of greed gape wider? When was our dicing
ever so reckless? Your gambler leaves his wallet behind

as he goes to the table of chance; he plays with his *safe* at his
elbow! 90
There what battles are to be seen, with the banker supplying
the weaponry! Is it just simple madness to lose a hundred
thousand, and then refuse a shirt to a shivering slave?
Which of our grandfathers built so many villas, or dined off
seven courses, alone? Today a little 'basket'
waits in the porch, to be snatched away by the toga'd rabble.
First, however, the steward anxiously peers at your face
for fear you may be an impostor using another's name.
No dole until you are checked. The crier is ordered to call
even the Trojan families; they too besiege the portals 100
along with us: 'See to the praetor, then to the tribune'.
A freedman's in front: '*I* was here first,' he says, 'why shouldn't I
stand my ground, without any fear or uneasiness? Granted,
I was born beside the Euphrates (the fancy holes in my ear-lobes
would prove it, whatever I said); but the five boutiques that I
own
bring in four hundred thousand. What use is the broader purple,
if while Corvinus is tending the flocks which someone has leased
him
out in the Laurentine country, I have a bigger fortune
than Pallas or Licinus?' So, just let the tribunes wait;
let wealth prevail; no deference is due to their sacred office 110
from one who recently came to the city with whitened feet.
In our society nothing is held in such veneration
as the grandeur of riches, although as yet there stands no temple
for accursed Money to dwell in, no altar erected to Cash,
in the way we honour Peace, Good Faith, Victory, Valour,
and Concord, who when her nest is hailed replies with a clatter.

When the highest magistrate reckons up, at the end of the year,
what the 'basket' is worth, how much it adds to his assets,
what of his clients, who count on that for their clothes and
footwear,
bread and fuel for their houses? The litters are jammed together 120
as they come for their hundred pieces. A sick or pregnant wife
follows behind her husband, and is carted round the circuit.
This man claims, with a well-known ruse, for an absent spouse.

Indicating an empty chair with its curtains drawn,
'That's my Galla,' he says. 'Don't keep her too long. Are you worried?
Galla, put out your head.'
'Leave her, she must be sleeping.'
The day itself is arranged in a splendid series of highlights:
'The basket', then the city square, with Apollo the lawyer
and the generals' statues—one, which some Egyptian wallah
has had the nerve to set up, listing all his achievements; 130
pissing (and worse) against his image is wholly in order.

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Weary old clients trudge away from the porches, resigning
what they had yearned for, though nothing stays with a man so long
as the hope of a dinner. Cabbage and kindling have to be purchased.
Meanwhile the magnate will lounge alone among empty couches,
chewing his way through the finest produce of sea and woodland.
(Yes, off all those antique tables, so wide and so stylish,
they gobble up their ancestors' wealth at a single sitting.)
Soon there'll be no parasites left. But who could abide
that blend of luxury and meanness? What size of gullet could order 140
a whole boar for itself, an animal born for parties?
But a reckoning is nigh. When you strip and, within that bloated body,
carry an undigested peacock into the bath-house,
death steps in, too quick for a will; old age is cancelled.
At once the joyful news goes dancing around the dinners.
The funeral cortège departs to the cheers of indignant friends.

There'll be no scope for new generations to add to our record
of rottenness; they will be just the same in their deeds and desires.
Every evil has reached a precipice. Up with the sail, then;
crowd on every stitch of canvas. Perhaps you may say 'But, 150
where is the talent fit for the theme? Where is the frankness

of earlier days which allowed men to write whatever they
pleased
with burning passion ("Whose name do I not dare mention?
What does it matter if Mucius forgives what I say or not?")?
Portray Tigellínus; soon you will blaze as a living torch,
standing with others, smoking and burning, pinned by the
throat,
driving a vivid pathway of light across the arena.'
So take this man who administered poison to three of his
uncles—
is he to go by, looking down on us all from his aery cushions?
'Yes, when he comes to *you*, seal your lips with your finger. 160
Simply to utter the words "That's him!" will count as
informing.
Without a qualm you can pit Aeneas against the ferocious
Rutulian; no one is placed at risk by the wounded Achilles,
or Hylas, so long sought when he'd gone the way of his bucket.
Whenever, as though with sword in hand, the hot Lucilius
roars in wrath, the listener flushes; his mind is affrighted
with a sense of sin, and his conscience sweats with secret guilt.
That's what causes anger and tears. So turn it over
in your mind before the bugle. Too late, when you've donned
your helmet,
for second thoughts about combat.' 170
'I'll try what I may against those
whose ashes are buried beneath the Flaminia and the Latina.'